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XVIII. German Action With Respect to Americans Formerly Stationed in France

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At his press conference on February 11, 1943 the Under Secretary of State, Mr. Sumner Welles, said there were one or two facts that he would like to ask the members of the press conference to think about since they were of particular importance and he wondered if the people of this country realized the full significance of what he had in mind. Mr. Welles said that he was talking about the action of the German Government in not only refusing to permit the diplomatic personnel of the United States who had been stationed at Vichy to leave France but also the action of the Hitler government in taking that considerable number of American diplomatic officers and putting them in concentration in Germany. As the press would probably remember, Mr. Welles continued, the reason for the action taken was that the German Government insisted that as part of the exchange involved, not only should the United States Government permit the members of the French Embassy staff here to return but also that we should permit the German members of the German Armistice Commission in North Africa, who had been taken at the time of the American occupation in North Africa, to be returned to Germany as a part of the exchange. Frankly, said Mr. Welles, that was one of the cheapest

efforts of international blackmail that he had yet known. After pointing out that the German Armistice Commission was composed of military and civilian members, Mr. Welles said that this Government agreed to permit the civilian members of the German Armistice Commission to be returned as a part of the exchange thereto properly in accordance with every principle of international conduct and law. The military members, Mr. Welles said, were regarded in a different category and not susceptible to that part of the exchange transaction. In conclusion, Mr. Welles said that that is the reason why our American diplomatic officials are now in concentration in Germany, and he thought it was important that the fact be known and thoroughly known.

When asked if we had made any protest to the Germans through the Swiss, Mr. Welles said that we had made numerous protests on the subject. In reply to a question as to whether there was any further action that the Government could take, Mr. Welles said not for the moment and added that he would put it that way.

Replying to a correspondent who asked if the military members were considered prisoners of war, Mr. Welles said that military members were considered by the War Department as prisoners of war.

A correspondent asked if the Under Secretary could elaborate to any extent on the treatment being accorded the American diplomats in Germany and began to point out that Mr. Welles spoke of a concentration camp. Mr. Welles interrupted to say that he did not say "concentration camp" but had said "in concentration". Mr.

Welles said that he understood that the American diplomats were lodged in a hotel in western Germany and the reports so far would seem to indicate that they were obtaining good treatment. When asked if there was no prospect of their coming home, Mr. Welles said not for the time being for the reasons stated.

A correspondent asked if that meant that our friends in Hershey, Pa., would have to stay there a while longer. Mr. Welles said that it seemed that way.

When asked how many were involved, Mr. Welles said that the correspondents would be given the appropriate figure. (The total number of the American group in Germany is 139, of which 95 are personnel of the State, War, and Navy Departments and the remainder, journalists and Red Cross and other relief workers. The Germans involved in the prospective exchange total 71, of which 47 are military personnel and 24 civilians.)